



Examining Leadership Characteristics at International Multilaterals

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses leadership characteristics in international projects that require cooperation. The influence of the leader's traits and qualities on the implementation of the multilateral project was studied under the framework of the Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus Trans-Border Cooperation Program. A multistage survey in different target groups was used for the research. The research revealed that there is no discrepancy between the effective leadership at multilaterals and effective leadership concepts in general. Nevertheless, some specific leader's characteristics and qualities can be underlined. Multilateral projects require leader to be competitive, self-confident, visionary and supportive at first. Herewith, the leader must have good knowledge on the project technical requirements, an ability to consult project team on performance, a capability to coordinate and to control project processes, a capacity to effectively manage project documentation, a competence of mentoring and employee engagement, an ability to meet project team needs, and perfect skills of project internal and external communication. The research also revealed that cultural differences of team members can determine the attitude towards leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Public administration organizations invoke interinstitutional cooperation, international experience sharing, etc. when developing their practices by standing ahead of challenges. The article analyzes one of them that is the way leadership influences the cooperation within international projects. In particular, the leadership traits and behavior are investigated in a project which was implemented under Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus border cooperation program (ENPI¹) which was dedicated to strengthen the border regions of the countries.

¹ ENPI - European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, official website on the internet: <http://www.enpi-cbc.eu/go.php/lit/IMG>.

In modern society, people with leadership qualities tend to be valued more in institutions and companies as superior employees, nevertheless leadership is treated differently in different cultures. S. Nauman et al. (2010) claims that it might be impossible to define the only one model of leadership in intercultural context, and the behavior of the leader which occurs when facing the challenges of management becomes a field requiring more and more attention. The purpose of the article is, on the basis of case analysis, to explore how the features of leadership differentiate between neighbor countries in the projects that require cooperation.

Theories and concepts of leadership are shortly reviewed in a theoretical part of the article. Results of quantitative and qualitative research are discussed in the research results section. At the end of the article, model based on the empirical research is offered, which lets the executives of the projects to improve the performance of international projects.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Leadership is perceived as interdisciplinary phenomenon. Researchers and practitioners attention is focused on every component of this phenomenon and the most important – their interaction: for the leader as an individual, his influenced group and the overall results of the group, which, in turn, determine the changes in the environment. Therefore, leadership should be understood as a set of various combinations of variables (Bahreinian et al., 2012; Porvazník, 2011; Valickas et al., 2017).

Research of leadership can conditionally be divided into two time periods (Vries et al., 2010): in the period from 1953 to the middle of 1980 the definition of leadership and the initial structures were considered; after 80's, the resolution and the effect of the leadership was started to be analyzed. In this period, there appeared new directions of the approach to leadership. These are transformational leadership, transactional leadership, situational leadership, visionary leadership, supportive leadership (Bhatti et al., 2012; Skakona et al., 2010; Morhart et al. 2011; Elenkov et al., 2005; Naqvi et al., 2011; Chaudhry and Javed, 2012; Borkowski et al., 2015; Jankurova et al., 2017; Pucetaite et al., 2015), etc. Furthermore, the behavior of the leader is often analyzed within four styles of leader's behavior: directive leadership, supportive leadership, achievement-oriented leadership and participative leadership (Bhatti et al., 2012, p. 745).

J. Iqbal et al. (2012), after the research of scientific articles, has noticed that publications which analyze the phenomenon of the leadership can be divided into two groups. The first one was assigned with articles which claim that the main task of the head of the company is to control the employees, because a person by nature avoids working. The second group is assigned with research which findings claim that head of the company reaches the best results when motivating the employees. This article is based on the latter approach. Research is based on the modern paradigm of the leadership, i. e. *collaborative leadership*. It claims that the specialists, the followers of the leader, knows everyday problems and processes the best, which is why they have to contribute to decision making (Raisienė, 2012;). Several theories are attributed to the paradigm of collaborative leadership: facilitative leadership (e.g. Wald et al., 2017), coaching (e.g. DiazGranados, 2017) and servant leadership (e.g. Roberts, 2014) are among those.

Leaders who go by cooperative leadership behavior models tend to support employees in case of an emerged problem instead of punishing them. These theories are characterized by a communications relationship. Management as a leadership goes useless when comparing to the behavior of the manager when he relies on other's followership (Raisienė, 2012; 2014). According to Z. Bhatti et al. (2012, p. 750), „*There is no assurance that any one leadership behavior will all the time be effective. But it must be agreed that any leadership behavior used by the leader while managing the affairs of his office is possible to have an influence on organization performance, be it positive or negative.*“

Leader's influence is the biggest when assuring the group's productivity and employees' personal effectiveness environment. If advice and inspiration is expected from the leader in the personal level, in the organization level leader is responsible for institution or company's culture, changes and innovation decisions (Skakona et al., 2010; Mishchuk et al., 2018). It is also worth to mention that the behavior of the leader that was effective in one environment could work absolutely different in the other circumstances (Elenkov et al., 2005, p. 679). By analyzing the social environment in which leader has to reach for the managing results, leader can increase the effectiveness of the actions by focusing to the behavior that leads to the best results. It is especially relevant in the intercultural environment, and in the context of this article – when carrying out international projects.

When talking about multilateral international projects, leader's behavior is well explained by a 3D model in which figures three dimensions of leader's behavior. It is orientation towards the tasks, relationship and the effectiveness of the general activity (Limbare, 2012, p. 173). These three directions of the leader's attention describe leaders' and their followership and give leaders a voice in the vertical of the management of organization. Meanwhile, in the horizontal level of the cooperation, when including stakeholders of the project, leader's role gets another character. Leader is not isolated at the top of the hierarchical pyramid. Here he is an element of the network, and the success of his work depends not on the individual behavior but on the cooperation (Maak and Pless, 2006).

When talking about leadership it is worth to notice that from 1990's, definition of the project management has changed a lot. More and more attention was focused on organizational and human resource aspects for the implementation of the projects. Meanwhile, the technical aspects were more highlighted before. It was found that in order to reach higher results of technical activity, very important are the leadership competences. Thanks to them, human issues are being addressed (Thompson, 2010; Flannes, 2004). Among the most effective leadership principles that make an impact on project's management are: promotion of decision-making with participation; exercise of open communication ensuring availability of information about the project; support, representation and empowerment in the distribution of powers; conflict resolution in the team; education and training of employees, etc. (Nauman et al., 2010).

In terms of competences the following classical leadership competences in project management are underlined: definition of roles and responsibilities, communication of expectations and clarity in communication, employment of consistent processes, establishment of trust (Ahmed and Anantatmula, 2017; Bileviciūtė et al., 2016). However multilateral projects are complex projects involving at least several stakeholders. The scientific literature on leadership characteristics in multilaterals is fragmented and insufficient. However this problem finds its conceptualization in closely related areas.

Complexity leadership theory developed by: M. Uhl-Bien et al. (2007), propose leadership in complex systems as a set of emergent, interactive network dynamics. Within complex systems it is difficult to attribute change to individual leaders: leadership acts emerge in different networks each at their own level. Local acts can produce small or bigger changes in other aspects of the system or in the system as a whole (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007, Nooteboom, Termeer, 2013). Complexity leadership theory proposes three leadership functions: administrative, adaptive, and enabling. Multiple actors can exhibit any or all three of these leadership functions. Administrative leadership is grounded in traditional bureaucratic notions of hierarchy, alignment and control. Adaptive leadership produces new ideas, innovations, adaptability and change. It originates in fight among agents over conflicting needs, ideas, or preferences and results in movements, change alliances, or cooperative efforts. Enabling leadership maneuvers and protects the conditions in which adaptive leadership can flourish, and it allows for emerging innovations (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007, Nooteboom and Termeer, 2013).

The authors investigating leadership competencies in complex healthcare research projects found the implementation of a private, public, and academic partnership, where scientific merit of methods and results to be a critical foundation to the development of public policy. The following key essential leadership competencies were identified in such multilateral projects: clear and transparent communication, ability to provide support, empowerment and ability to build relevant capacity, systematical and critical thinking, consensus building, mobilization, negotiations and mediation skills, evidence-based decision making (Strudsholm et al, 2016).

Based on focused group discussions and a survey of Indian Administrative Service officers, V. Gupta, S. Chopra and R. K. Kakani (2018) identified the following leadership competencies relevant for complex public sector projects, namely considering people first, leading others, integrity, decision-making, planning, coordination and implementation, problem-solving, self-awareness and self-control and innovative thinking. The eight competencies were further clubbed under four meta-competencies, namely stakeholder analysis and decision-making, managing change and innovation, team building and positive administrator personality (Gupta et al, 2018).

Observing contemporary leadership capacity in involving network state D. Pedersen and C. Tangkjær (2013) identify several essential competences of leaders dealing with complex projects in public sector institutions. The first of them is analytical thinking. Public managers play an important role not just as neutral bureaucrats, but they also have a decisive role and a heavy responsibility to create public value. Leaders should be able to understand institutional and discursive complexities and inconsistencies in a multi-contextual and multi-layered public sector (Ibid.). Communityship, the second competence. The term was coined by H. Mintzberg. It is basically about how managers are responsible for their own institutions, i.e. municipalities, as a community driven by engagements and strong ethical beliefs and standards, it is a matter of sustainability of public services and organisation, rather than short-sighted beliefs in profit. Authority and legitimacy in the involving municipality are no longer distributed through hierarchies and formal organisational forums, but are to a much higher degree a result of capability to act, create and relate own organisational effort to complex contexts of politics, strategies, ambiguities and counterproductive expectations from politicians, citizens, employees, partners, enterprises, medias, and so on (Pedersen and Tangkjar, 2013). The third competence is critical reflexivity. It is more than a matter of technical skills regarding organisation and its management. Critical reflexivity means raising social, political and cultural issues, questioning purposes and intentions and, if necessary, challenging the assumptions and taken-for-granted-ness on which organizational policies and practices are based (Reynolds, 2011). The last competence, which is very important in the contemporary institutional contexts, is managination. This means that public strategic leadership is a creative practice that brings forth an action world for public value creation using public, action and transformation images (Thygesen and Tangkjær, 2005).

In general, summarizing the insights of J. Kodjababian and J. Petty (2007), M. Uhl-Bien et al. (2007), K. Thompson (2010), K. Yen-Lin (2009), M. Bahreinian et al. (2012), S. Nooteboom and C. Termeer, (2013), S. Nauman et al. (2010), D. Pedersen and C. angkjar (2013), T. Strudsholm et al. (2016), R. Ahmed and V. Anantatmula (2017), V. Gupta, et al. (2018) and other researchers, we can say that an effective project leader must make decisive decisions that are in line with the interests of all stakeholders, ensure an open information and communication circulation, build good relationships in the working group, address emerging conflicts, anticipate operational and collaborative threats, ensure teamwork as well as to take care of technical project indicators and to keep in mind the vision of the organization and the general group activity and the objectives of the project. To ensure operational efficiency, productivity and maintain good relationships with the project team - these two areas need to be combined. And even if the manager succeeds in solving this challenge, combines human and technical factors, there are still many environmental factors that also determine the performance of the organization or the project being carried out. It is clear that effective leadership and project management involve a huge amount of competencies and requirements.

2. METHODS

The influence of the leader's traits and qualities on the implementation of the multilateral project was studied under the framework of the Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus Trans-border Cooperation Program (under the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument 2007-2013). The purpose of the research was to delineate a model of the leadership in multilateral projects on gathered data from particular international project.

A multistage survey in different target groups was used for the research. In the study there were interviewed ENPI Program Coordinators-experts (3 persons), project leaders (10 people) as well as the interviewees of the ENPI private Facebook group followers - project professionals (60 people).

Coordinators of the ENPI program with codes K1, K2, K3 given when generalizing interview data were involved in the first phase of the study. The survey involved 2 Lithuanian and 1 Latvian citizen. Respondents' experience in the field of multilateral projects in various positions, e.g. project management, coordinator, monitoring maker, trainer, etc. was 3 and more years. The number of projects in ENPI program coordinated by experts was 10 to 30. This demonstrates a great deal of respondents' experience and knowledge in the field of similar type of activity.

In the second phase of the study, 10 project leaders from the ENPI program participated. The survey was attended by Lithuanians, Latvians and Belarusian citizen living in Lithuania and Latvia and Belarus. 7/10 respondents' experience in the field of projects was over 5 years, 2 respondents - from 3 to 5, and 1 respondent from 1 to 3 years. Half of the respondents executed 1 ENPI project each, and the other - 2 to 3 projects. 6 of interviewees were project managers, and 4 - coordinators. Types of projects carried out by leaders: infrastructural, public service, cultural or socio-cultural.

A semi-structured interview questionnaire for coordinators of the ENPI program consisted of 14 questions, and the one for leaders consisted of 15 questions. Questions were asked directly to respondents. Their responses were captured and transcribed and analyzed by grouping similar content and concepts after.

During the third phase of the survey, when interviewing the project professionals, the link to the survey at www.manoapklausas.lt was placed in a private ENPI Facebook group. No demographic data of the participants of the study was asked. With the use of open questions, respondents were asked to describe characteristics of the program's project leaders and their behavioral peculiarities, as well as to indicate which leadership characteristics would positively influence the effectiveness of the projects that were being implemented.

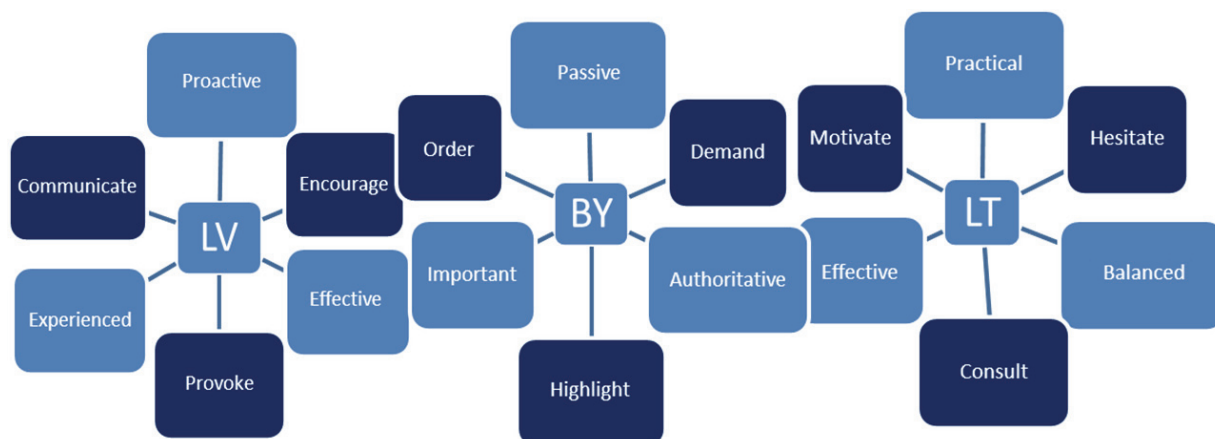
3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Summing up the results of research Phase I, it can be stated that interviewees highly value the influence of leadership on the success of ENPI program projects and consider leadership competencies as crucial. Speaking about leader's knowledge, competencies and behavior, respondents highlighted: i) the specific knowledge and ability to meet project technical requirements, ii) the knowledge of team members needs and ability to manage them successfully, and iii) maintaining team spirit and teamwork capability.

Summarizing answers, it turned out that respondents identified the leadership with the ability to meet the twofold challenges of project management: technical expertise and managerial expertise. According to interviewees, the leader in the ENPI program projects must firstly understand the specifics of the program. The second most important factor in project implementation efficiency is the ability of leaders to bring partners into a united team. The factor of internationality of team is a significant challenge requiring specific competencies for the leader.

During the interview, program coordinators were also asked about the differences between the leaders of the three program countries. Respondents were asked to describe the leaders of Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus with one of the most characteristic adjectives and one of the verbs. Latvia's leaders were described as experienced and proactive, Lithuania's – as more balanced and practical, and Belarus's - as authoritative and influential. As could be seen from a Figure 1, leaders of Lithuania and Latvia were also described with one mutual attribute. It is effectiveness. However, all the other features that are common to the leaders of different countries differ substantially.

Figure 1. Characteristics of leadership in ENPI program



Source: research done by authors.

As well as ENPI program coordinators, project managers emphasized the importance of leadership for the effectiveness of the projects, too. However, leadership here relates exclusively to the technical part of the project. According to project managers, a leader is a good guide to ensure that the project is implemented in a timely manner, according to a strict plan, budget, etc. The motivation of the project team, the rewards to the team members, inspiration and support are not considered important.

Finally, results of the last stage of the research (answers of project professionals to the questionnaire) has shown that for them, the most important attributes of the leader was to be an organizer/coordinator, a team coach and a general visionary.

4. MODEL OF LEADERSHIP AT A MULTILATERAL PROJECT

Based on results of the three research phases, it can be said that the effective leadership in multilateral projects includes such components: i) knowledge on the project technical requirements and ability to consult project team on the project performance as well as capability to coordinate and to control project processes; ii) competences of team building, covering mentoring, engagement and support; iii) ability to meet project members' needs related with the project activities; iv) capability to integrate a vision, long-term goals and everyday activities of the project; v) capability to responsibly control the project documentation; vi) capability to secure well-timed, open, and adequate communication inside and outside the project team.

As noted above, the leadership differs in the context of different countries. Communication between partners helps to minimize the differences, and as the research shows, leader is also responsible for it.

Combining the results of all three research phases, the theoretical model is proposed which can be used by the project managers of similar multilateral projects so they can achieve the intended results.

Table 1. Leadership characteristics and qualities at multilaterals

<i>Traits and characteristics</i>						
Competitive	Self-confident		Visionary		Supportive	
L E A D E R A T M U L T I L A T E R A L S						
<i>Skills and qualities</i>						
Knowledge on the project technical requirements	Ability to consult project team on performance	Capability to coordinate and to control project processes	Capability to manage project documentation	Competences of team building covering mentoring and engagement	Ability to meet project members' needs related with the project activities	Perfect communication skills

Source: authors.

The research-based model consists of two parts: leader's personal characteristics, and his skills and qualities (Table 1).

CONCLUSIONS

The study showed that cultural differences can determine the attitude towards leadership. Although the focus of our research was leaders of jointly implemented projects from neighboring countries - Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus, it turned out that the leaders of each country are characterized by certain characteristics.

The research also revealed that there is no discrepancy between the effective leadership at multilaterals and effective leadership concepts in general. Nevertheless, some specific leader's characteristics and qualities can be underlined. Joint, multilateral projects require leader to be competitive, self-confident, visionary and supportive at first. Equally, leader must have good knowledge on the project technical requirements, an ability to consult project team on performance, a capability to coordinate and to control project processes, a capacity to effectively manage project documentation, a competence of mentoring and employee engagement, an ability to meet project team needs, and perfect skills of project internal and external communication.

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